/58/

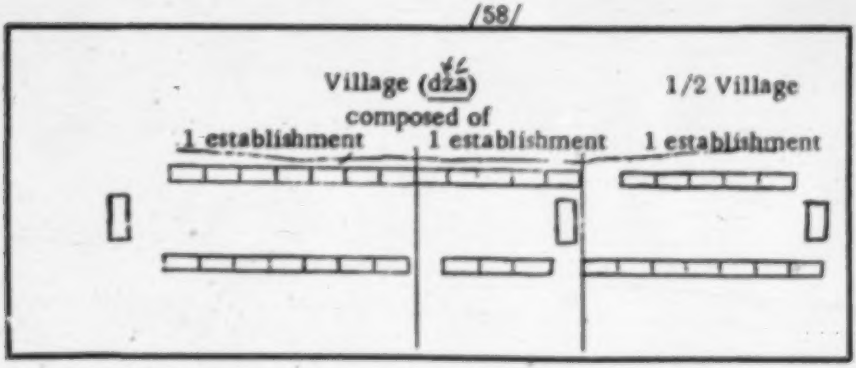


Fig. 18. Development of a Village from Individual Establishments.

to force his people to complete it. At one time, for instance, the chief of the village Nsälang (Fig. 23 shows one of the temporary meeting houses of that village) made the proposal to me -- a proposal which I, of course, gratefully declined -- that I should either force his people, or make my people available, to build a new meeting house for him. Then, as he put it, everybody would say: "This chief of the Whites is quite a fellow; you can tell that a White lives near his village." At best, the chief's people bring him some roofing mats for the construction and in this way believe they have fulfilled their duty toward the community project. The actual work is always up to the chief. Even so, the house does not thereby become his property; rather, in each case it is the common property of the men. When the chief says, "It is my meeting house," they are not affected by his statement. The Pangwe avoids anything and everything that might disturb him in his customary peace and comfort; he shies away from work and lets things run their course:

zɔ́k e tsí dan ebɛ̌ɛ̄-asɛ́ i, a ye oa
Elephant, he frightened away (from) pit-iron-stone, he gave you

atɛ̌ɛ̄i, a nī oa adzīɪ
poverty, he took (from) you heaviness. /59/

That means: The elephant that frightened you away from an iron-stone pit, made you poor, it is true, but at the same time he relieved you of a burden (namely, that of preparing the iron).

227 upwards in such a fashion that their tips just protrude above the water.

It goes without saying that such weirs can be built only when the water level is lowest. As soon as the water in the river rises, it carries many fish with it and /113/ drives those which are not caught in the baskets of the lateral weirs onto the screens where they often remain in large numbers and are simply picked up by the Negroes. They are reached by a special bridge built out from the bank or by climbing along the edge of the lateral weir.

227 This kind of fish weir occurs everywhere except in the north.
●423 Usually the chief induces a number of people to construct such a weir; these people then have the sole right of ownership to the fish weir and the fish. They do give their relatives and acquaintances, probably for nothing, a part of their catch, either from a sense of solidarity or because they expect that in similar circumstances they will be provided for in the same way. On the other hand they
[425] demand payment from strangers, the amount depending on the size

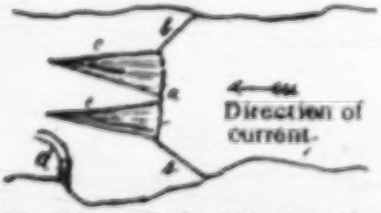


Fig. 60. Diagram of a Fish Weir in the Abea: (a) main weir, (b) lateral weirs, (c) screens of the main weir, (d) a tree growing on the bank and bent over the water.

of the fish, one or two spears (seven or 14 pfennigs) apiece. The major part of the catch is consumed immediately; the rest is
[251 dried. Since fish spoil quickly in the tropics, only a very few leave
435] the place where they are caught; another reason for this is that the uncertain conditions in the Fang area prevent regular trade (1).

1. There are no markets at all.

227 In addition to the contrivance just described, consisting of main
285 and lateral weirs, one also encounters lateral weirs used by themselves

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showed that the ore "exhibits a not inconsiderable titanium content, some sulphur, traces of phosphoric acid, a small calcium content, as well as a small magnesium content, in addition to the usual components, such as silicic acid, iron oxide, aluminum oxide, water, and small quantities of manganese."

simply collected and carried off. The iron ore pits (ebé-asɛ́i from
[423] asɛ́i, "rock containing iron") have no special significance for the Pangwe; they are common or rather ownerless property that could be claimed by anyone. The smelting of the iron ore, on the other
325 hand, takes place in special smelting huts which are usually the
423 common property of several fellow villagers; they alone may produce the iron from the ironstone which they themselves have extracted from the pits. The other people in the village may not use the smelting hut and must buy iron from them. Because of the difficulties involved in the enterprise, smelting is done only at /227/ widely separated intervals of time. On each occasion the furnace is loaded rapidly as many times in succession as there are hut owners on hand. Each owner, therefore, has a claim to the iron obtained from one loading of the furnace.

325 The smelting hut (ndɛ̄-akūɛ̄, ndɛ̄i-akūa), Figures 181 and 182,
343 is a simple lean-to, three to four meters high, whose ridge pole is supported by two beams. A pit (Fig. 182, Drawing 5, c), 78 centimeters deep and 1.86 meters in diameter, is dug into the ground in the center of the hut and the furnace is built over it. Another shaft (Drawing 5, b), about 60 centimeters deep, goes down from the floor of the pit, and it is on the bottom of this shaft that the above-mentioned pot with the smelting medicine is placed (Drawing 5, a). The medicine is covered with rotten leaf sheaths from the plantain so that the skulls will stay nice and cool, and then the entire shaft is filled with leaves.

325 If smelting is contemplated, all the participants, that is, the
372 medicine man, the hut owner or owners, and the hired workers, must, as was mentioned, abstain for two months from sexual

245 Planters boast of the number of their trees. Does this transformation go deep? Balandier thinks not: "Present-day interest in cacao growing ought not to mislead us—the Fang is not by nature a farmer; he raises cacao insofar as it brings in money and commodities." (2)

2. Balandier and Pauvert, Villages gabonais /Gabonese Villages/, I.E.C.A. /Institut d'Etudes centrafricaines/, Brazzaville, 1952.

Within the last forty years millions of trees have been planted. A few figures will go to show the extent of this activity: in Boulou country there is an average of 1, 500 cacao trees per able-bodied man at Ebolowa, 1, 100 at Sangmélima, 950 at Djoum. In Beti country, the plantations are not so large, either because the soil was less fertile or because the population density did not allow as much land to be withdrawn from subsistence crops. Nevertheless, there are 413 trees per able-bodied man for the whole Yaoundé region. Distribution by subdivision is of some interest because it makes it possible to understand how far cacao trees have extended. The M'Balmayo subdivision comes first with 743 trees per man; then Djongolo with 655; Etse, 415; Akonolinga, 401; Saa, 378; Mfou, 347; Okola, 277. The Nanga-Eboko figure does not warrant consideration, the subdivision being in part in an unfavorable climatic area. /32/ Ebolowa is clearly the center of diffusion, and the contagion of example explains perfectly well the gradually decreasing density of the plantations. At Yaoundé or Akonolinga, plantations are fewer because the custom of planting is more recent. But the low figures for Saa or Okola are probably to be explained by the difficulty of finding empty land in areas where the density of population may reach 100 persons per square kilometer. On the other hand, extreme sparsity of population becomes an unfavorable factor. Djoum with 0.8 persons per square kilometer is less abundantly planted than are Sangmélima or Ebolowa with 8 to 10 persons.

In measuring the importance of the cacao trees to the local economy, the distribution-per-man figures will give no indication of the distribution of the ownership of trees or of wealth. The entire production is in African hands. Everyone considers it a point of honor to own a plantation. Townsmen, officials, or /salaried/ employees, whose

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| | Office-holders | Trade Employees | Traders | Butchers | Tailors | Carpenters | Masons | Chauffeurs | Mechanics | Motor Boys | Domestic | Laborers | Chiefs | Planters |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Percent of Delinquents | 4.8 | 15 | 7.5 | 4 | 8 | 5 | 3 | 13 | 10 | 23 | 8.3 | 8 | 0.8 | 0.8 |

Employees in trade, chauffeurs, and apprentice chauffeurs are the social groups with the lowest standard of behavior. The nature of the delicts makes it possible to be precise: in the Beti country of the Cameroons, moral delicts /delit de moeurs/(desertion of the conjugal domicile) make up 47 percent of the cases; theft and swindling, 26 percent; intentional assault and battery come far behind with 16 percent.

These figures enable us to measure the decline of the present-day family. (J. B.)

### e. Land Tenure

463 According to early documents land regulations formerly were very simple. There appears to have been no rights over land: "Land belongs to whoever takes it; it has no value. It is not sold, not given as a guarantee for debt, does not enter into inheritance." There is absent not only the notion of private ownership of land but also that of collective ownership: "There is never any conflict between villages over ownership of land. . . . We often see an outside village insert itself between two groups of dwellings belonging to the selfsame Boulou village." (1) In Fang country in Gabon the situation was

1. Report to the League of Nations, 1922.

similar: "In the Woleu-N'Tem region, tradition is unaware of the idea of ownership even by a village." (2)

● 423 2. Sautter, Bulletin d'Études centrafricaines, 1950 (no. 102).

[144] Migrations and conquests still belong to the recent past. Besides, /74/ the movement of peoples was effected without organization or authority: different clans, tribes, and peoples overlap, family by family, so that it is not possible to determine the territorial base of a collective group.

Among the Ewondo and Eton the situation is slightly different: the clans, probably better organized, preserved a certain amount of cohesion and carried out their conquest without becoming scattered. Therefore we find that they have boundaries between villages and collective rights over land. "Once plots of land have been cleared, they are not abandoned for good. A village looks upon them as a [241] reserve." In fact population density very much limits shifting cultivation.

[178] In the past forty years customs have changed a great deal and, among these peoples where land tenure was embryonic or nonexistent, ideas are arising that approximate Western rights of ownership.

[16] Population is now pretty nearly stable. It would be quite logical for rights over crops within a fixed boundary to arise, and in this direction some development is making itself felt. In certain areas 423 anyone may still cut wood, lianas, gather wild fruits, or hunt, to 241 satisfy his personal needs, but if he makes a profit from the sale of these things, he must obtain the consent of the family /occupying/ the area in which he carries on this activity. Elsewhere, the use of certain produce even for private requirements is subject to permission or to sharing the harvest. Thus the customary principle of the free use of natural goods is being restricted, at least in certain particular cases. With increase in population comes the idea of a virtual right over uncultivated forest lands. Families consider that they alone have the right to clear the land on which they depend. Men with experience state clearly that "formerly everyone cleared forest land without asking anyone's permission. Now that the country is becoming populous, permission must be asked." In less populated cantons clearing in the great forest goes on without restriction.

In conformity with ancestral customs, the harvest belongs to the cultivators: a right over personal property rather than a right over land. Nevertheless, a tendency toward a right of land ownership is

423 241 making itself felt. Indeed, before any sowing, trees have to be cut down and the land cleared. This work has a relatively permanent effect: to clear undergrowth of ten to fifteen years is less difficult than to clear a bit of primary forest. Furthermore, the original clearer of the land is acknowledged to have rights over the fallow. Within a family, each head of a household can put back into cultivation fields which he used to work, and in such a case each wife has the right to go back to her old plot. When collective ownership is involved, the process has not been so clear. This is understandable, for when a village leaves its old site and no one remains in the neighborhood, it means that no return is expected. Therefore, abandoned sites may in general be occupied without difficulty and without explicit agreement.

But in the case of cacao plantations it is obvious that the right arising /75/ from cultivation is transformed into right over land. Right to the harvest has turned into right over the tree that bears it and over the ground in which the tree grows: the duration of a plantation justifies this transition by settling men for two or three generations.

This transition, however, has not been entirely accomplished, and some people want to insure their right over the land by planting trees upon it; and peculiar devices may be observed, such as a competitor's setting out cacao trees between those of an emigrant planter, in order to oust him.

423 609 Development /evolution/ in the direction of ownership has not yet ended. There is now a right of use, but a right of disposal has not been established. Many believe that land cannot be sold. Not, it seems, on religious /sic/ grounds, but because the collective group would /in such a case/ be definitely defrauded. In this connection the attitude toward outsiders /l'attitude des etrangers/ is indicative. In this region of inextricably mingled clans and tribes, the problem of outsiders arises constantly. Those that belong to sister tribes are looked upon almost as members of the group, but others, coming from more distant populations, follow special regulations. They must ask for land from the head of the family near which they settle: he authorizes them to clear a field for a subsistence crop, but forbids them to plant cacao trees. In fact, if making a field of maize gives right of possession to the land for a few months, the establishment of a cacao plantation would lead to long-lasting possession. There is no question of a custom connected with the owning of trees, since the older inhabitants insist that formerly

any stranger could plant melen palms (Elaeis guineensis) and sa (Pachylobus edulis), but of a defense reflex to preserve control of a valuable crop and to ward off the wave of immigration it could attract.

An examination of forms of pawning fields leads to a similar conclusion: there is far from a complete right to dispose of property. The harvest rather than the land is pledged. Among the Ewondo, in fact, the creditor may harvest and dispose of the produce. "Should the harvest surpass the debt, he will turn over to the debtor part of the produce. Since the owner runs the risk of having his land go to waste, the creditor may keep it in good heart and thus increase his credit. He may be induced to keep the property for several years: in fact, he keeps it long enough to be repaid out of the harvest. However, there is no assumption that he can keep it perpetually. Here we run into what is probably an important difference between the local land tenure and our own: everything takes place as if the land were inalienable (1)." The trend is similar among the Boulou, though

1. J. Binet, Budgets familiaux dans la zone cacaoyère du Cameroun /Family Budgets in the Cacao-growing Region of the Cameroons/, L'Homme d'Outre-mer, No. 3, 1956 (no. 93).

it must be admitted that the question of pawning land does not raise serious economic problems at present. (J. B.) /76/

f. Personal Property

This is undoubtedly the only form of property originally recognized. *Much of it seems to have been collective, at least as concerns* valuable possessions: the ésa was in charge of these possessions, the family patrimony which served mainly to pay the minsuba, "bride prices." There was, however, individual ownership of useful objects, men's weapons, women's gardening tools and household equipment, objects that were buried with the owner. It seems, also, that there was a sexual differentiation between the various categories of possessions: biôm beyôm were masculine, biôm beyal were feminine, a distinction to be traced not to ownership, but to use and perhaps to origin. I have already mentioned that in the bilaba the njem bilaba of the west contributed imported goods, while his eastern counterpart

562 children before marrying her off. In the economic sphere a young unmarried woman may freely undertake all sorts of commercial enterprises, whereas a married woman would need her husband's consent. Nor do divorce or widowhood, /82/ any more than marriage, emancipate a woman in theory. Escaping from her husband's guardianship, she falls back under the authority of the head of her family, but from the point of view of custom this is not a detrimental situation, since every person remains subject to his father.

Therefore the liberty women possess in managing their inheritance [459] ought not to appear an anomaly. Besides, individual savings are widespread in Africa. And the division of property into masculine and feminine allows women and girls to own objects which neither [422] husbands nor fathers may take from them. A partition of goods is the logical consequence of these assumptions.

Women theoretically have the right to dispose of the product of their labor—their harvest—but they must provide the basic foodstuffs. Only the surplus is sold, but in the majority of families when large sales take place the proceeds are divided between husband and wife. Women usually control the proceeds of day-to-day sales in a market or to passing travelers; petty amounts comprising only 10 percent of the total family budget. They may invest these profits by joining [459] a tontine (a society in which each person makes a contribution on a fixed date and of which the capital is allotted to each member in turn).

Thus the traditional means for growing rich are limited. But changing customs are allowing women to follow various occupations that will make them independent. Women engaged in trade or dressmaking, for which they pay a license, business trade employees or saleswomen, theoretically have to be authorized by their husbands who may decide how the earnings are to be spent. In actual fact women seem to be free agents. Even in the customary courts they appear alone, unaccompanied by fathers or husbands.

423 In the sphere of land tenure the trend is the same: women are 562 acquiring a certain amount of property. With stabilization /i.e. settling down/, the growth of collective rights over cleared land or land good for tillage is quite understandable. The idea of allowing a personal right to a woman who is not truly a member of a family, but merely loaned to it, seems an aberration. This, nevertheless, is the situation among the Ewondo, where a divorced woman

423 continues to have rights over her old garden plots and may gather the 532 harvest from them. Among the Bané and the Boulou the position of divorced women is no the same, but the tendency is so, for when fallow land is cleared every woman goes back to the plots she used to work four or five years before, and sons may demand plots that have been cultivated by their mothers.

Cacao plantations raise other problems. A man concerned for his children's future may turn over a plantation to a wife or encourage her to make one for their son. In other cases childless women start [533] plantations as a mean of providing for old age. Women with children do not have to fear, for their children will look after them. Finally, there is an even more important /83/ change appearing: a matrimonial system of community of property is developing. When a woman has collaborated with her husband to set up a plantation, she has the right upon his death to keep the usufruct. Even if her son inherits the plantation and sells the produce, it is she who collects the proceeds. This is an important development, because it is evidence of a kind of equality between spouses who are keen and efficient in harvesting the produce of the same piece of land. It furthermore shows that the [534] household is a legal reality vis-à-vis the two individuals, on the one hand, the patriarchal family, on the other. (J. B.)

## Chapter 6

## Principal Elements of Culture

### 1. Physical and Mental Characteristics

#### a. Anthropological Data

141 The first travelers describe the Fang as very tall, well built, and with a formidable appearance. This opinion certainly contained a good deal of subjective evaluation, because the figures given, for instance by L. Dugast, some of which are cited below, indicate simply an above-average height: